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ABSTRACT

Aimed at tutors with some experience of adult literacy work, this handbook offers information and advice that should help them adapt their teaching approaches to meet the needs of partially sighted students. It outlines the situations that are likely to arise during the tutoring situation with an explanation of common sense procedures and simple aids and describes how existing literacy material could be adapted to cater to the various conditions involving partial sight. An introduction describes visual problems. Section 2 concerns the first meeting with a student during which the tutor determines the student's level of literacy, the area in which he/she requires tutoring, and what he/she can see. In section 3, suggestions are made for making the most of vision. Light and lighting, magnification and viewing distance, and enlargement, contrast, and clarity are discussed. Section 4 offers practical ideas to encourage students to make maximum use of other senses to overcome difficulties presented by the distorted or indistinct visual images of the print. A conclusion presents several general teaching suggestions. An attachment lists addresses of resource organizations as well as sources of educational resources, both print and nonprint. (YLB)

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Literacy and Partially Sighted Adults

An Introductory Handbook

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Published jointly by
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Foreword

Most people take for granted the benefits of perfect sight and rarely think about what it would be like to live without good vision. Yet the difficulties created by partial sight can be particularly disabling and affect people's lives in many ways.

Of course the problems are different for each individual and by no means all of those affected will be in need of help with basic education. However, an increasing number of partially sighted adults with literacy needs are seeking help from their local adult literacy scheme and this handbook has been produced with this in mind.

Aimed at tutors with some experience of adult literacy work, it offers information and advice that should help tutors to adapt their teaching approaches to meet the needs of partially sighted students. Specific problems that are likely to arise are illustrated, together with a number of strategies for overcoming them.

We hope that the book will provide a useful resource for everyone interested in helping partially sighted adults improve their basic education.

Alan Wells
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Bob Greenhalgh
Honorary Chairman
Partially Sighted Society

The Working Group

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The Working Group was co-ordinated and administered by Pamela Jones and Rosemary Carter.

For the purpose of clarity and simplicity, 'he' is used when referring to a student and 'she' when referring to a tutor.

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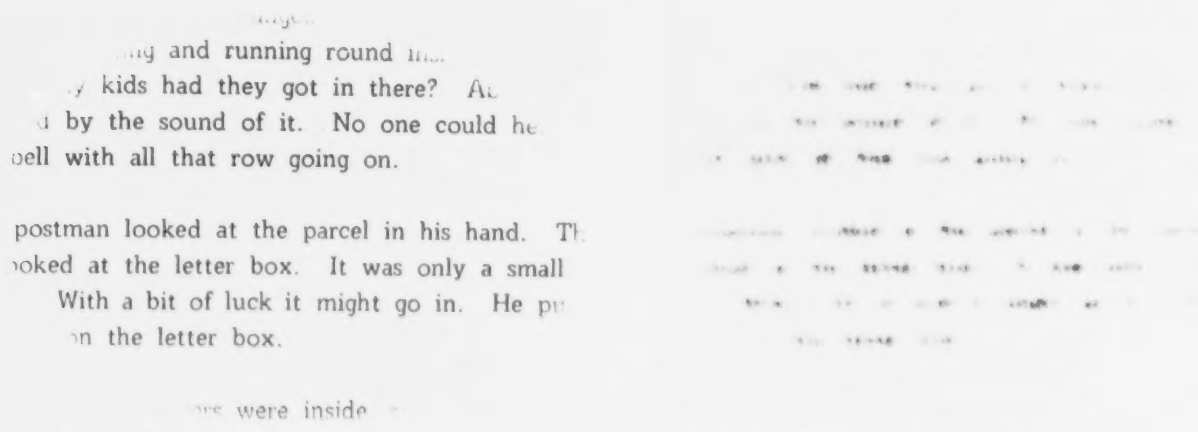
Introduction

If you are fully sighted, you will probably have taken the benefits of perfect vision for granted all your life. Others, though, may not have been so fortunate. In fact there is an estimated minimum of $\frac{1}{4}$ million people in Great Britain who have a partial, but nevertheless disabling, loss of vision which cannot be corrected by conventional spectacles. Most of these people experience difficulty in seeing to read and write, and consequently in literacy skills, and so may seek help.

This book is intended for tutors who are experienced in working with adult literacy students but have little experience of the particular problems involved when teaching students with vision difficulties. The book outlines the situations which are likely to arise during tuition with an explanation of common sense procedures, simple aids and describes how existing literacy material could be adapted to cater for the various conditions involving partial sight.

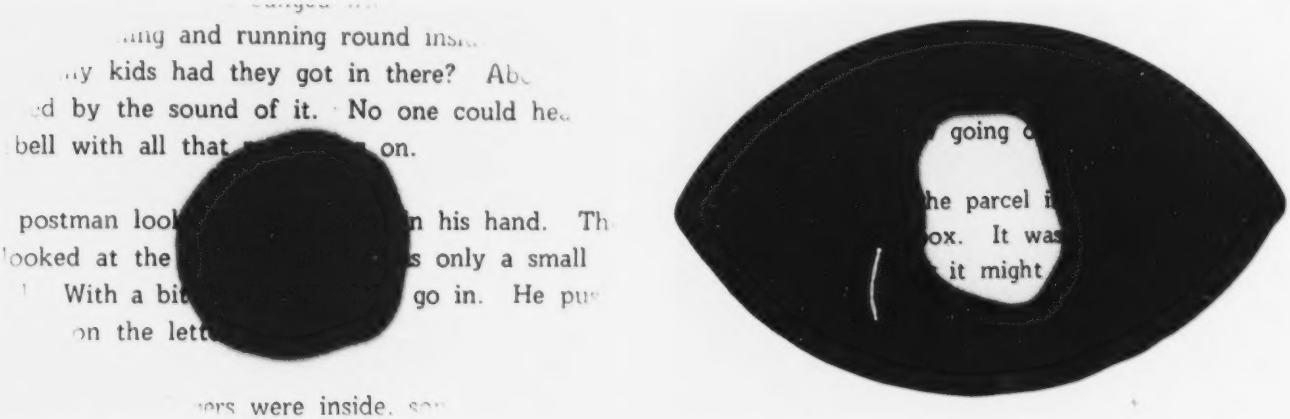
Vision Problems

A partial loss of vision can result from many different causes. The way in which the person's ability to see and to use vision is affected, varies considerably from individual to individual. Here are some examples (fix your gaze on the centre of each picture:)



Left: A page of print as seen by a fully sighted person (with spectacles or contact lenses if they need them).

Right: A number of vision disorders can lead to blurring so that words and objects appear hazy and indistinct. Included is an uncontrollable 'wobble' of the eye called nystagmus. The nature and extent of reading and writing problems will depend on the degree of blurring.



Left: A complete loss in the centre of the field of vision like this, is especially common amongst the elderly. Unfortunately, this is just the part of the eye we use for reading and other detailed work.

Right: Tunnel vision. The portion of the picture left intact varies considerably from person to person. Often, the student will be able to see to read words without too much difficulty, but scanning to find the next line and locating items on the page may not be too easy. (Try it yourself by closing one eye and making a narrow tunnel in front of the other by clenching your fist).

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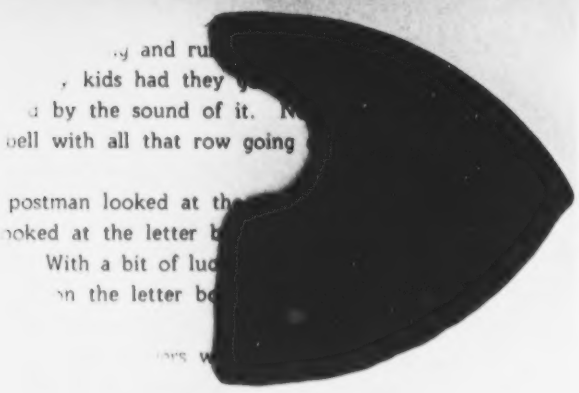
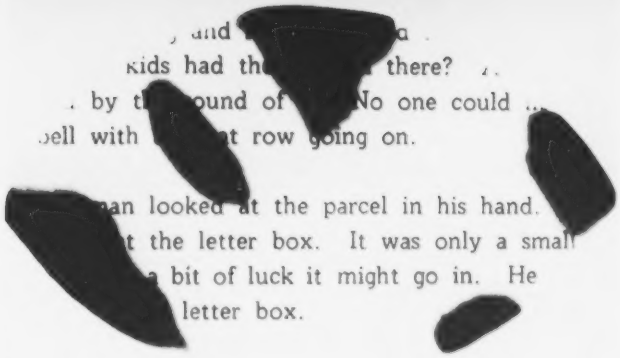
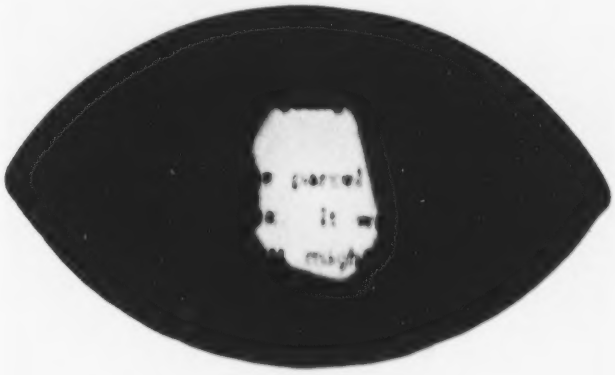




Left: *Because we read from left to right, loss of the right hand half of the picture will make reading very difficult. (This sort of loss always affects both eyes. It can also happen on the left hand and, more rarely, in the upper or lower portion).*

Right: *Sometimes, however, the loss is not quite so symmetrical – it can be patchy like this.*

What all these different defects boil down to is one or other of two things: loss of visual acuity (the ability to see fine detail), or loss of field of vision (how much of the picture is intact). Whilst acuity can sometimes be at least partly improved by spectacles, a defect in the field of vision cannot. The two basic types of deficiency can also be present at one and the same time. Seeing to read with tunnel vision, for example, becomes much more of a problem if there is also an uncorrectable loss of acuity.



The best way of finding out about your student's particular vision defect is, simply, to ask him to describe to you in detail the picture that he perceives. The student's literacy problems and tuition requirements will depend on his level of vision and the particular type of defect. There are, for for example, many, often quite simple and straightforward ways in which defective vision can be assisted to give better vision – by enlargement, as in large print; by the use of a magnifier or other forms of optical low vision aid (LVA); and by light and lighting arrangements. You will find details later in this book.

If you want to know more about the eyes and defective vision, some further reading is listed in 'Useful Information'. Although you might find the 'Glossary of Common Eye Terms and Abbreviations' mentioned of use, you do not in fact need to be conversant with these terms, nor with the different causes of vision defects to work effectively, with the student. However, because this subject is particularly prone to be cloaked in such terms, it is also subject to many popular misconceptions, which you might encounter. Here are some common ones:

MYTH	FACT
Blind people cannot see	*Out of 120,000 Registered Blind people in England and Wales, only 5,000 are totally blind. 8 out of every 10 have useful vision.*
Blind people have super sensitive powers of touch and hearing	*A blind person's senses are no more acute than anyone else's, but they can learn to pay careful attention to what their ears and body surfaces can tell them about their surroundings.*
Blind people use braille to read	*Most registered blind people can see to read, especially if they receive appropriate assistance. (The exact number who read braille is not known, but is probably less than 1 in every 20 blind persons).*
Partially sighted people use large print books to read	*Whilst enlargement is an important aid to vision it is only one of a number of ways of enhancing legibility and is not useful to everybody.*
You can recognise a partially sighted person by the thick, pebbled lenses in his glasses	*Although optical aids are very important, many eye defects cannot be helped by conventional spectacles, so the person may not wear glasses at all. If he does, these may look like a perfectly ordinary pair.*
Sight should be 'saved' or it may wear out through over use	*Eyesight, even defective eyesight cannot be worn out or otherwise damaged by use. It can and should be used to the full.*
Reading and watching TV from close up will strain the eyes	*The eyes cannot be 'strained' although the muscles which move them may become tired, just like any other muscle in the body. If this happens, closing the eyes and resting for a while should relieve any temporary discomfort.*
Bad light ruins eyesight	*It is certainly not helpful to read in a dim light, but it cannot harm the eyes in any way.*
Artificial light is bad for the eyes	*Flourescent and other artificial lighting cannot harm the eyes. Indeed, good lighting of any sort is an invaluable aid to vision especially for those with vision problems.*
People who are colour blind see only in shades of grey	*There is no such thing as 'colour blindness'. People with a deficiency in colour vision see colours less vividly but their world is never completely black and white.*

Meeting the Student

The first meeting with a student with vision problems is particularly important as the tutor has to find out not only the student's level of literacy and in what area he requires tuition but also what he can actually see.

The student does not want to be treated any differently from other students so the tutor shouldn't be afraid to use such phrases as . . . See what I mean? or Did you watch the football on T.V. last night? It should be remembered, however, that because students with vision problems are not as visually capable as the rest of us they may not have the same basic knowledge of words or social sight vocabulary that might be expected from a literacy student with normal sight.

Helping the student become familiar with the room and the building

At the first meeting the tutor should try to make the student at ease both with students in the group and also with the room and building in which tuition will take place. (A student may have good near sight for reading but poor distance sight for finding his way around, or vice versa. He may not be able to see as well in the dark). It would be a good idea for the tutor to meet the student at the entrance to the building and walk with him to the classroom. This can be done in such a way as not to offend the student: by walking next to him and talking so that he is near enough to see and to hear. It shouldn't be presumed that he wants to be guided. If he is unsure of his surroundings and needs help he may take the tutor's arm. The tutor should never take hold of the student or try to steer him round. She should instead ask him if he would like to take her arm: he can then have a light hold of her elbow.

The tutor should never take hold of the student or try to steer him around. She should instead ask him if he would like to take her arm; he can then have a light hold of her elbow.

Once the tutor has chatted to the student and found out what he can see and read she should ask him whether he would like her to show him round the room. If he says 'No' then his decision should be respected. If he says 'Yes' a time should be chosen when it would not draw attention to him.

Here are some guidelines for helping someone to become familiar with the room:

- ☐ Begin from the door as it is the most important feature.
- ☐ Work from the door along one wall. Point out things of importance as landmarks, e.g. a table, cupboard or radiator.
- ☐ Go all the way round the room and back to the door.
- ☐ Work from the door to a landmark and back again. This is a cross reference and will help the student to find out what is in the middle of the room.
- ☐ Go to the front of the room and tell the student the layout of the tables and chairs.
- ☐ If the student has to get books, paper or a typewriter from a cupboard relate the cupboard to a landmark and avoid him having to walk through rows of chairs.
- ☐ The student might like to sit in the same place each week as a point of reference.

At the first meeting it may be helpful to the student to show him where the toilets are and the place where coffee is served.

Referrals

It is probable that the referral of a student with vision problems will fall into one of three distinct categories.

1. The student may have been referred by a specialist agency, e.g. a college or centre for the visually handicapped, a welfare worker or a social worker. In this case there will probably be a reasonable amount of background information relating to the student's sight problems.
2. The student refers himself and is aware of the difficulties associated with his sight.
3. Some students' visual problems may not be immediately apparent and they may not choose to mention or be aware of them. It is possible that there may be students who fall into this category who are already in literacy provision.

Assessment of the student's literacy needs

As with any student wanting literacy tuition it is important to ascertain his needs at the first meeting. He may not believe that he has any serious literacy difficulties since he may, in his own estimation, have reached a satisfactory level of education. In this case it is possible that he took exams by means of a scribe and so did not write, spell or punctuate the work himself.

What can the student see?

Before the tutor begins to find out what the student can read she should ask him how much he can see and perhaps to describe to her his picture of the room. She should also ask him if he uses any aid for reading of which there are a variety. See Page 10. If he does, she should encourage him to explain how it works. Many people are unwilling to use low vision aids as they single them out from other people.

How does the student read?

The tutor should find out how the student's vision problems affects his literacy. It may be that his low literacy level is unconnected to his vision problems; he may not have reached a satisfactory level of literacy for the same sorts of reasons as other students.

It is important to find out at the first meeting what size of print the student can read comfortably so that future work can be prepared in that size. The student may not want to feel he is putting the tutor to trouble and so may say he can read print smaller than is comfortable. The tutor should, therefore, offer a range of print sizes. For a student at the beginning stages she might print in three sizes the student's name or days of the week or months of the year. Newspaper headings also provide a variety of large print sizes.

If a student uses a low vision aid for reading it is possible that he can read normal print size but the tutor should always check with him before giving him a piece of work to do. It isn't unkind to ask, 'Can you see this?' 'Is it big enough for you to read?'

The questions to bear in mind or to ask while assessing are:

- ☐ Can the student see the whole word or is he only seeing the beginning, middle or end and imagining the rest?
- ☐ Can he locate separate items on the page?
- ☐ Can he scan from line to line without difficulty? How does he scan?

How does the student write?

The tutor should find out what is the easiest way for the student to write. She may find that although the student's writing is readable to the normally sighted he cannot read it back to himself. If the writing is for the student and the tutor only it doesn't matter how large the writing is as long as it is readable.

The tutor may find that the student has no conception of capital letters if he has always communicated in braille which does not have capitals. On the other hand, a student who attended a school for the partially sighted may write entirely in capitals as, until quite recently, these schools only taught the upper case to encourage clarity of writing.

Previous learning experience:

Once the tutor has found out the literacy level of the student and what he can actually see, it should be possible to decide whether the student needs to acquire new basic literacy skills or has to re-acquire literacy skills lost because of his vision problems. If the student has to acquire new literacy skills the tutor should employ the same kinds of technique as with a fully sighted student, bearing in mind the ways in which vision can be assisted. (See Page 13, Checklist).

There are three main reasons why the student may be having to re-acquire literacy skills: he is gradually losing his sight, he has a background of braille or he is unable to cope with print.

- ☐ the student who is gradually losing his sight may have a basic framework of literacy but be out of practice or have forgotton much of what he knew. He will have got out of the habit of being aware of words. He may have been issued with a low vision aid which brings reading within his scope once more or he may be able to read large print with or without a low vision aid.
- ☐ the student with a background of braille may come forward for literacy tuition because of an improvement in his sight or because he has been issued with a low vision aid. He is likely to be aware for the first time that he can actually see print but because he has only ever read or written braille does not understand what the symbols mean. The first step is to help him to recognise the names of the alphabet in print and to recognise words and sentences.
- ☐ A student may come to the literacy scheme whose sight is so poor that he can no longer cope with a visual means of communication. In this case it may be advisable to refer the student to a specialist teacher of braille, (see note on Braille Page 20).

Making the most of Vision

Vision is not constant. Even for the fully sighted, it varies depending on conditions like lighting levels, and on the qualities of the material being viewed. For those with vision defects, however, these factors will be critical and careful attention should be given to selecting teaching materials, and arranging the work situation, so that the student's eyesight can be used to the full.

1. Light and Lighting:

Although some less common eye defects lead to a requirement for less light, and dimmer working conditions, most students will need substantially more light than would a fully sighted person. Light levels in a room as a whole can be increased by:

- ☐ choosing where possible a room decorated mainly in bright colours, which reflect more light into the room
- ☐ drawing curtains well back from windows during daytime
- ☐ working next to a window, with the student seated at right angles to it
- ☐ using available electric lighting, even during daylight hours
- ☐ cleaning lamps, shades, tubes and diffusers. Dirt and grime accumulate quickly and prevent light being given out.
- ☐ changing lampshades if necessary to ones which direct light upwards as well as down (e.g. large drum type), or in all directions (e.g. paper spherical). Do not simply remove them because the resulting glare may be unbearable for the student.

However, no matter how efficient is the lighting in the room as a whole, this will nearly always need to be supplemented by the use of a reading lamp. Fully adjustable ones, like the Anglepoise type are ideal. It is then much easier to achieve the precise arrangement needed by an individual student to get the required amount and direction of light whilst avoiding glare from a direct view of the bulb or tube.

Careful positioning of a reading lamp can prevent troublesome reflections from the upper surface of a lens.

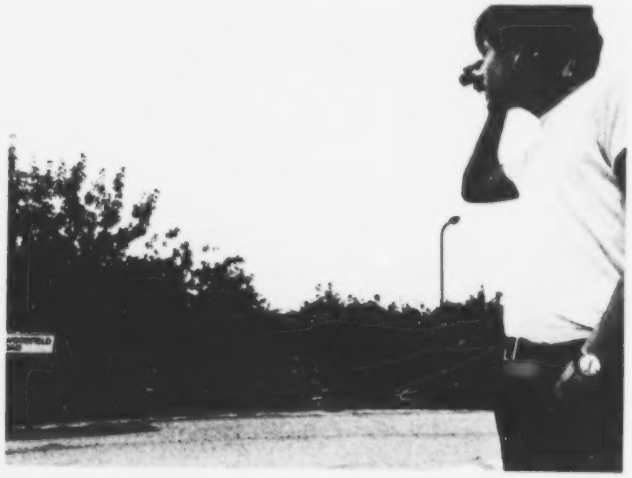
2. *Magnification and Viewing Distance:*

Although not of benefit to everyone, moving or holding material closer to the eyes is the simplest of all aids to vision and can do no harm, even if the distance is only an inch or two. (The eye muscles may however become tired more quickly in these circumstances, so frequent rest periods may be needed).

Some students, especially those with central or patchy field losses, may also benefit by viewing materials from an angle, although this requires some practice to be successful. To avoid cramped posture from close or sideways viewing, a reading stand, adjustable drawing board or typewriter copy holder can be useful.

Special viewing postures like these can, however, have disadvantages. They can look rather unnatural and be embarrassing, especially in social situations, and shadowing of light by the head and hands may be a particular problem. In other instances - reading the destination board on a bus for example - it may be physically impossible to get close enough to the object in question.

Magnifiers and other types of optical low vision aid (LVA) can often assist by making objects easier to see at distance, and also in reading and other close work. There are many different types, each for a different purpose. Usually, there is a compromise involved because the larger the lens, the smaller is the degree of magnification although more of the task will be in view at any one moment. Remember also that not every student will benefit from magnification; those with tunnel vision, will not for example.



A miniature telescope magnifier can be taken from the pocket to read bus and house numbers, clocks, notices, etc. at a distance.

Magnifiers have to be viewed straight on. Note the distortion seen from this camera angle, which would not in this case be apparent to the student.

In addition to reading and close work, a spectacle mounted magnifier could also be prescribed for prolonged viewing at a distance (eg. for watching television).

Using a magnifier close to the eye increases the area of print in view. Because the lens has to be the correct distance from the page for the print to be in focus, a stand mounted magnifier can often help.

Electronic aids such as closed-circuit television (CCTV) reading aids are made specifically for partially sighted people, and are by far the most sophisticated and expensive type of magnifier. These are nevertheless becoming more widely available for use in local libraries and some colleges of FE, and a student may be able to get access to one in this way. Overhead or slide projection may be useful ways of producing magnified images.

3. Enlargement, contrast and clarity:

For students who need it, enlargement can be put to good use by:

- ☐ large print books
- ☐ other items available in a large print version (e.g. playing cards; lexicon cards and scrabble; dominoes and large dice; enlarged number discs for the telephone; large print tags for medicine bottles)
- ☐ subject to copyright approval, having selected material in sheet form enlarged by photographic or photocopying methods. The original must be good quality. A local college, architect or town clerk's office may be able to help, otherwise contact the Partially Sighted Society
- ☐ producing large print material by hand.

When making materials bear in mind that contrast (ie print density) is just as important as size. So:

- ☐ on white paper, a good quality black felt tip may be best with thickness of tip, size of lettering and spacing agreed with the student. Generally, spacing should not be exaggerated.
- ☐ try also experimenting with different colour combinations. For example, would black ink on pale yellow paper be easier for the student to see? (Lighting has an affect on colour judgements, so always assess these with the lighting which will be used in subsequent tuition).
- ☐ do not use glossy paper, which can give troublesome reflections nor absorbent paper which spreads ink.
- ☐ when producing typewritten material, try using a jumbo face typewriter if available, with a high density ribbon and double or treble spacing.
- ☐ self adhesive or transferrable letters, although expensive, will give boldness and high contrast in a choice of sizes and styles to suit individual students. The simpler 'sans-serif' faces are often preferable (try Helvetica Bold). Many students will also prefer reversed contrast – white or light coloured letters on a dark paper or background.
- ☐ alternatively, 'cut and stick' large letters from magazines, quality newspapers and posters (try the local supermarket for the latter). These can be used for games, work cards etc.
- ☐ for work produced during lessons, used computer print out is a cheap source of large sized scrap paper. A Dri Wipe marker board would be an alternative. (These are made for use with either spirit based or water based pens. Although more convenient in use, note that the vapour from spirit based pens is toxic if inhaled for a long period).

In the case of printed reading matter, and handwriting materials for your student's use, offer a variety from which he can choose. Generally:

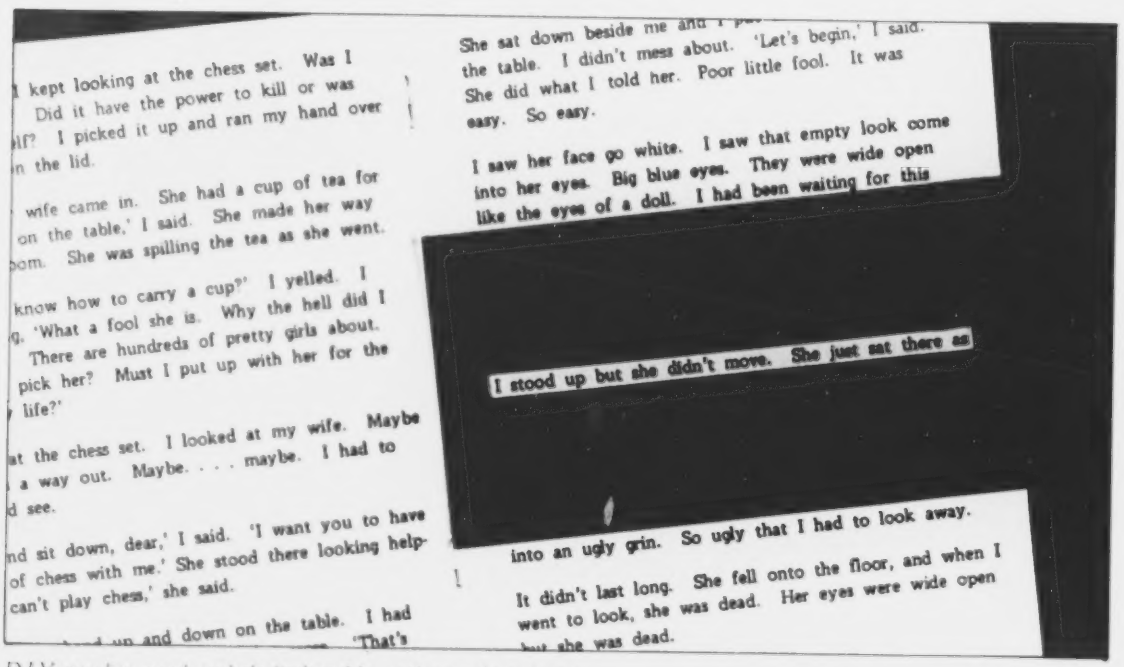
- ☐ avoid low contrast print. Poor photocopies, carbon copies, some paperback books and newspapers are examples.
- ☐ look for clarity of print in terms of size, boldness, print quality and density, and even-spacing of words.
- ☐ offer a selection of pens and lined paper for writing. Heavily lined paper is often helpful. Loose leaf sheets are available and can be kept in a ring binder or file. Alternatively use ordinary lined paper and go over the lines with a black pen to make them stand out.
- ☐ if a student chooses to use a standard exercise book, suggest he writes on every other line (often helpful when reading back his own work).

Easy to see in dense black ink

But not so easy

Dense black- effective use of contrast

- a piece of paper or non transparent ruler may be used to help the student to keep track when reading. It is possible to make cardboard frames like this:


I kept looking at the chess set. Was I
Did it have the power to kill or was
lf? I picked it up and ran my hand over
n the lid.
wife came in. She had a cup of tea for
on the table,' I said. She made her way
om. She was spilling the tea as she went.
know how to carry a cup?' I yelled. I
g. 'What a fool she is. Why the hell did I
There are hundreds of pretty girls about.
pick her? Must I put up with her for the
life?'
at the chess set. I looked at my wife. Maybe
a way out. Maybe. . . . maybe. I had to
d see.
nd sit down, dear,' I said. 'I want you to have
of chess with me.' She stood there looking help-
can't play chess,' she said.
and down on the table. I had
'That's
She sat down beside me and
the table. I didn't mess about. 'Let's begin,' I said.
She did what I told her. Poor little fool. It was
easy. So easy.
I saw her face go white. I saw that empty look come
into her eyes. Big blue eyes. They were wide open
like the eyes of a doll. I had been waiting for this
I stood up but she didn't move. She just sat there as
into an ugly grin. So ugly that I had to look away.
It didn't last long. She fell onto the floor, and when I
went to look, she was dead. Her eyes were wide open
but she was dead.

D.I.Y. reading mask to help find and keep the reading place

- plastic masks and guides can be obtained to help write envelopes, cheques etc., writing frames like these may also help to form even, reasonably sized letters.

Finally remember:

- contrast can be just as useful in seeing and finding objects. So try always to place articles for use by your student, like pens, papers and books, on a contrasting surface. (White paper, for example, on a blotting pad can be impossible to spot).
- the ideal is to find the best combination of all the various vision factors for the individual student and the task in hand, not only for speed and accuracy, but also for comfort and ease of seeing.
- selecting and preparing visual material for your student will take time and care so that he can make the most of his vision during, and after, tuition.

Making the most of vision: Checklist

Lighting

Choose room with light decor
Draw curtains well back
Work next to the window
Use electric lighting, even during daytime
Clean light fittings
Change lampshades
Use adjustable reading lamp

Viewing and Distance

Hold material closer to the eyes
View material from an angle
Use of reading stand/copy holder

Magnification

Use of magnifiers
Use of CCTV reading aid
Use of overhead/slide projection

Enlargement

Large print books/other items
Copy enlargement
Do-it-yourself large print

Contrast and Clarity

DIY materials

Black felt tip pen on white paper
Try other colour combinations
Avoid glossy/absorbent paper
Typewritten
- jumbo face
- high density ribbon
- double/treble spacing

Self adhesive/transferrable letters
Cut and stick letters
Computer print out paper
Dri Wipe marker board

Selecting printed matter/handwriting materials:

Avoid low contrast print
Choose clear print (size, boldness, print quality/density)
Offer variety of pens/lined paper
Student writes on every other line
Use of reading/writing guides

In general:

Avoid placing like coloured objects on like
Find the best combination of factors
Take time and care in selection and preparation

Making the most of Other Senses

When you have ensured that the learning materials are as visually acceptable as possible, it will still be important to incorporate activities which emphasise the tactile, kinaesthetic and auditory aspects of learning. It is also worth considering ways of encouraging the student to make maximum use of the context to overcome the difficulties presented by the distorted or indistinct visual images of the print. Here are some practical ideas for doing this.

Reading

Using context

A Language Experience Approach will obviously be useful since the language and the content of the text is the student's own. But when working on other pieces or books there are a number of things which can be done to help the student use contextual cues.

Before reading

- ☐ Talk about the content.
- ☐ Draw attention to any headlines or illustrations.
- ☐ Read the text to the student before asking him to read it.
- ☐ Look at any words which he may find difficult and talk about them.

Whilst reading

- ☐ Encourage the student to make sensible 'guesses'.
- ☐ If he gets stuck, go back to the beginning of the sentence and read it to him.
- ☐ Or read on a bit further if this is more helpful.
- ☐ If he mis-reads but the 'guess' makes sense go back to it at the end of the passage. Interrupting could impede his flow so that he loses the sense of the text.

Oral cloze exercises

- ☐ These can be done with another student or as a group activity.
- ☐ Read the passage to the students and ask them to supply suitable words to fill the gap.
- ☐ When they have decided on the word you can write it in the gap. (Do not give partially sighted students written cloze exercises as they are too visually confusing).

Tape based activities

- ☐ Putting the text on tape is particularly useful when the student is working on his own. A normal reading speed can be listened to before reading. A slower speed can be used for listening whilst reading. Any recording should be made to the best possible standard. (There are many good books on tape recording techniques). For students with vision problems the following should be considered:

- ☐ Give clear and concise instructions
- ☐ Introduce the subjects or purpose of the tape.
- ☐ Practical instructions for when to:
  - stop the tape
  - listen
  - take action
  - 'the end'

Using other senses to reinforce

When the student is building up a sight vocabulary the visual image of the word can be reinforced by presenting it in a form which can also be felt and heard.

Tactile flash cards

- ☐ These can be made of anything which will raise the surface of the letters. Try string, matchsticks, sandpaper, felt. Hi Marks is a special marking agent which produces a definite raised line about the thickness of a felt pen.

Plastic Wooden Letters

- ☐ These can be used by the student to assemble and feel the shape of the word whilst saying it. (Students who are braille readers could use 'uni lock' letters or lexicon cards which contain both print and braille).

Tracing

- ☐ Sight words can be written in crayon or on a chalk board so that the student can trace over them with his finger.

Using listening comprehension and anticipation

Anticipation

- ☐ read one page or short section of a story and ask the student to suggest what might follow
- ☐ read the next part, see how and if perceptions have changed.

Find the question

- ☐ give the answer, the student has to frame the question. e.g. 'In Spain'. Possible question: ('Where did the World Cup take place?')

Headlines

- ☐ cut out or make up newspaper headlines.
- ☐ talk about the possible story that might follow.

Writing and spelling

Handwriting (see also Making the most of vision)

- ☐ Use heavily lined paper or go over the lines with a black pen to make them stand out.
- ☐ If you use ordinary exercise books encourage the student to write on every second line.
- ☐ Offer a selection of pens for writing.

Spelling

Always work on words the student needs or wants to use. Keep the number of words worked on in any one session low and provide plenty of opportunity for revision. Try to offer learning strategies which use as many senses as possible and relate a new word to a previously known word. If the student normally types then use typing rather than handwriting when learning and practising spellings.

Sensory approaches

- ☐ Look - Trace - Cover - Write - Check (Multi-sensory)

Encourage the student to trace the word with his finger so he can feel the shape of the word and to say each syllable as he traces it.

Adapted pronunciation

- ☐ Mnemonics, Rhymes and Jingles

These are most effective if the student makes them up.

Logical approaches

Any logical approach helps the student to make generalisations about possible/probable spelling patterns. Ways of developing a logical approach include:

- ☐ looking at prefixes, suffixes, and root words.
- ☐ discovering word derivations.
- ☐ making generalisations about 'rules' in the students own words.
- ☐ compiling own dictionaries under different headings, eg. work, home, job, or syllable patterns or letter strings of alphabet.

Visual imagery and visual memory

Visual imagery and visual memory are important aspects of spelling. Because of his impaired vision the student may not be as skilled as others at these and will certainly not be getting visual reinforcement of words as frequently. Activities which encourage and develop visual imagery and memory include:

- ☐ look at a word, cover it and ask questions such as 'How many letters are there?' 'How many 'e's were there?' and so on.
  - Kim's Game
  - Pelmanism

Impairment of the visual image of the word may result in the student not noticing particular letters or letter strings. Ways of drawing attention to these include:

- ☐ underlining in colour if it helps, parts of the word being learned.
- ☐ ask the student to underline or circle a particular letter or letter string in a group of words or paragraph.

Conclusion

A little background knowledge and a lot of common sense is sufficient to modify and adapt literacy tuition and material, when working with a partially sighted student. The tutor will quickly become accustomed to the student's vision problems and so gain knowledge of the best possible ways of presenting material. Bear in mind the following points.

Language Experience

When working with a student in the early stages of literacy or one who is learning print for the first time always use the language experience approach. This method ensures that words are meaningful and appropriate to the student's own experiences. It is likely that this method will be particularly appropriate with students who have thought that books were a visual means of communication which have been out of their scope.

Repetition and Revision

It may be necessary at first to include a lot of repetition, especially with spelling, until the student gains confidence in himself and the methods used. A student may also want to remind himself of the last paragraph or page by re-reading or discussing it. However, as with the practice of any new task the student with vision problems will become quicker as he becomes more proficient in reading and writing skills.

Misspelling Misreading

The tutor must bear in mind when checking a word which the student has either copied or is learning by the look/cover/write/check method that it is very likely that the student not only sees the word shape differently from the tutor but because of his particular vision problem he may see the shape of the individual letters as forming a different pattern from that which the fully sighted student sees. Many partially sighted students have difficulty forming the letters - a e o c, because they often look the same shape. After a time you will get to know your student's handwriting and know whether he has misspelt a word. Until that time, when a student checks the word he is learning and says that it looks the same, then accept his judgement.

Typing

Encourage typing as well as writing since clarity and speed may be essential in everyday life. The advantage of typing is that work is always legible and neat, but one major disadvantage is that the student may not be able to read it back to himself.

Rest and Variety

Make every effort to avoid boredom and fatigue by incorporating a variety of work involving the different senses. A student may frequently need to rest both his eyes and hand/arm since he may well be unused to reading and writing.

The Senses

It is important to use a combination of senses such as vision, touch and hearing with students. The amount of time spent on each will vary and may change over a period of time as the student develops each particular skill.

Useful Information

ADDRESSES

1. Royal National Institute for the Blind (R.N.I.B.)
   224 Great Portland Street
   London W1N 6AA. Tel: 01-388 1266
   (for information and aids related to those with little or no sight)

2. Disabled Living Foundation (D.L.F.)
   346 Kensington High Street
   London W14 8NS. Tel: 01-602 2491
   (information sheets on reading aids for the visually impaired. All enquiries to be accompanied by a SAE)

3. Partially Sighted Society (P.S.S.)
   Midlands Office, Breaston,
   Derby DE7 3UE. Tel: 03317 3036
   (for information and aids related to those with partial sight. Please send a large SAE)

POSSIBLE RESOURCES

Aids writing/typing

1. *Dri-wipe marker board and pens*
   Marker Board Supplies Ltd.,
   Rockfield Road,
   Hereford, HR1 2UA

2. *Angled work boards*
   - Portable drafting unit (an angled work board)
     British Thornton - model KQO2A
     available from local drawing offices suppliers
     In case of difficulty contact:
     British Thornton Ltd
     PO Box 3
     Wythenshawe,
     Manchester, M22 4SS
   - Visually Handicapped (V.H.) Work board
     Sheltered Work Shop,
     c/o College of Art & Technology,
     Bath Lane, Newcastle-upon-Tyne,
     NE4 4TQ. Tel: 0632 327465

3. *High Density Typewriter Ribbon*
   large stationers or
   Columbia Ribbon and Carbon Manufacturing Co Ltd.,
   Kangley Road, London SE26

4. *Heavy Lined Paper* - Partially Sighted Society

5. *Writing guides*
   Envelope address template - free from branches of Lloyds Bank
   Cheque templates - free from branches of major banks
   Allowance/pension book guides - R.N.I.B.

6. *Heavy Duty Marker Pens* - Large Stationers or
   Berol Water Colour Markers
   Berol Ltd.,
   Oldmeadow Road,
   Kings Lynn, Norfolk, PE30 4JR

7. *Large Print Materials*
   Books - local library (eg large print dictionary)
   P.S.S. (eg large print STD code list; crossword book)
   Dice - R.N.I.B.
   Dominoes - R.N.I.B.
   Medicine bottle tags - chemists (supplied by the makers of Veganin)
   Playing cards - P.S.S.
   Self adhesive/transferable letters - most stationers
   Telephone dialing discs
   - Telecom Sales Shops or P.S.S., (plastic type)
   - Surrey Voluntary Association for the blind, (paper type)
   School Lane, Fetcham, Surrey KT22 9JX.
   Tel: 0372 377701

VISION

1. *Magnifiers and optical low vision aids* - see Optical Information Council OIC leaflet (under "further reading") in Further Reading

2. *Social Signs*
   Social Sign cards from
   Learning Development Aids,
   Park Works,
   Norwich Road,
   Wisbech,
   Cambs PE13 2AX

3. *Flash Cards*
   Calendar vocabulary flash cards - Philip and Tacey
   Essential notices flash cards - Philip and Tacey
   North Way, Andover, Hants.

TOUCH

All available from the R.N.I.B. Sales Department:

- ☐ Dual print/braille letters - Unilock word building letters
- ☐ Lexicon cards
- ☐ Games such as scrabble
- ☐ Handwriting aids etc.

Hi Marks - From the Partially Sighted Society:

Raised letters:
From Mothercare and Philip and Tacey Ltd.

HEARING

1. *Specially adapted tape recorders*, including variable speed and tone indexing
   Foundation for Audio Research and Services for Blind people
   12 Netley Dell,
   Letchworth,
   Herts SG6 2TF

2. *Cassette tape recorder player* with raised control symbols from
   Bell and Howell,
   Alperton House,
   Bridgewater Road,
   Wembley, Middlesex HA0 1EG

3. *Pocket Memo* (Philips machine with audible adaptations)
   Leatherland Business Equipment,
   34 Castle Boulevard,
   Nottingham NG7 1HT
   Other memo machines are also available locally from Boots, Dixons and Tandy shops.

FURTHER READING

The Eye Book by John Eden (Penguin paperback) - basic information for the lay person on the eyes and how they work, and the more common eye disorders. Booksellers; price £1.95.

Publications from George Marshall - a series of low cost pamphlets covering most eye defects in non technical terms, aids to vision and a useful "Glossary of Common Eye Terms and Abreviations". Send SAE for list to G. H. Marshall, 'Waterside', The Green, Long Itchington, Rugby, Warwickshire.

So you're partially sighted . . . (Optical information Council)
free leaflet in large print about magnifiers and how to get them. Send a large SAE to: OIC, Walter House, 418/422 Strand, London WC2 0PB.

Reading for the Visually Impaired (Library Association) - lists the major commercial publishers of large print books. Free with large SAE to L.A. 7 Ridgmount Street, London WC1E 7AE.

Good News for the Partially Sighted by Gerry Holloway - practical information and handy hints and tips on daily living, including reading and writing. P.S.S. Publications, P.S.S. Business Office, 40 Wordsworth Street, Hove, E. Sussex BN3 5BH. Price £2.00 inclusive (2nd edition).

In Touch by Thena Heshel and Margaret Ford - a comprehensive handbook on aids and services for visually handicapped people. BBC Publications, PO Box 234, London SE1 3TH. Price £2.95 inclusive (3rd edition). In Touch is also the title of a Radio 4 programme for blind people.

Light for Low Vision edited by Robert Greenhalgh - a handbook on lighting and the visual environment, large print, low vision aids and other resources. P.S.S. publications (as above); price £3.00 inclusive.

NOTE ON BRAILLE

Braille is a system of embossed signs which enable a person with insufficient sight for visual communication to both read and write. This type of student may wish to go on to a skills training course such as audio-typing or telephony and may have been refused entry because of poor spelling. In this case a tutor may be able to help the student orally with spelling and all written work be typed. Further information may be obtained from the R.N.I.B. which publishes an information booklet "Reading by Touch" or the local Social Worker for the blind may be able to give advice on learning communication skills and information about the availability of aids and apparatus.

Available from:
Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit,
Kingsbourne House, 229-231 High Holborn,
London WC1V 7DA.
Telephone: 01-405 4017

£1.50
plus postage and packing

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